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The Effects of Pre-Reading Activities on Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of three types of pre-reading activities (movie-watching, vocabulary presentation, and pre-reading summarization) on the reading comprehension of 76 elementary-level EFL Iranian learners. The participants were randomly assigned to one control and three experimental conditions and then a pretest was given to them. After completing the initial stages, participants in all groups read the same passages under different conditions for seven sessions. Each group was then given a posttest. After that, Paired-samples T-tests were run to find out if the participants had made any significant gains from the pretests to the posttests, which proved to be the case. Results of a One-way ANOVA also revealed that students who had received treatments were better in performance than those who had not received any treatment. Finally, the Split-plot ANOVA test run on the results of the posttest and delayed posttest indicated that there was a slight decrease overtime in scores of the students in two of the experimental conditions which was the result of both instruction or class type and its interaction with time but not time itself.

Keywords: movie watching, vocabulary presentation, pre-reading summarization

1. Introduction

Iranian learners of English as a foreign language learn English in the classroom environment but cannot use it out of the class or in real-life situations. Therefore, reading is an essential source of input to them. Also, a lot of teachers do not know how to engage students in reading activities or they find it difficult. This means that a lot of energy is wasted and the point of teaching texts or passages is missed. This study investigated specifically the extent to which pre-reading activities might improve EFL learners' reading comprehension.

1.1 Research Hypotheses

1.2 The research hypotheses of this study were:

H0$_1$- Pre-reading activities do not affect students' reading comprehension from pretests to posttests.

H0$_2$- There is no difference in the effectiveness of the three pre-reading activities of watching movies, vocabulary presentation, and pre-reading summarization.

H0$_3$- Participants' scores in different groups change significantly from posttests to delayed posttests as a result of passage of time.

1.1 Participants

The initial pool of the participants composed of 90 students who were selected randomly from among first and second grade high school students in Ardabil, Iran. All participants were female and native Iranian students and their ages ranged from 14 to 16. In order to determine the students' proficiency level, a proficiency test was given to them prior to the beginning of the research and 14 students, who missed the test's cut-point, were excluded from the study. The students were then randomly assigned to 4 groups of 19 with the non-qualifying students distributed evenly among them. There were three experimental groups and one control group. The groups were called Movie Watching Group (MWG), Vocabulary Presentation Group (VPG), Pre-reading Summarization Group (PSG), and No Treatment Group (NTG). The participants were at the elementary level of English proficiency and the courses were offered to them for two months. Six sessions were spent on piloting of the study and giving pretests and posttests to the participants. The actual treatments lasted for seven sessions.

1.2 Research Design

With respect to what was said, it is clear that the design of the study had been a true experimental design but since the comparisons were made within and between groups, it also can be called a within-between groups design. On the other hand, measuring the effect of time means that the design had also been a repeated measures design. The overall name that can be given to the design of the study, therefore, is a within-between-repeated-measures design.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Pre-reading activities are activities that are used with the students before teaching of the actual reading materials. Pre-reading activities, prepare students for better comprehension by making them familiar with the topic, vocabulary, or structures that they may come across in the text (Bilokcuoglu, 2011). For Tudor (1990) pre-reading activities refer to "the range of pedagogical techniques whereby learners are engaged, prior to their main processing of a target text, in text-related conceptual activities designed to help them to process their text in a more meaningful manner" (P. 96). Haque (2010) sees pre-reading activities as warm-up activities which prepare students for reading tasks. The activities do not have a set format and may differ in their length. They may also differ in terms of the amount of input that is needed for students to complete them. Ausubel (1963) views pre-reading activities as 'advance-organizers'. Advance organizers, provide the necessary information for the learners and activate their existing knowledge to assist in processing and retaining of the text.

Hyde (2002), likewise, highlights the facilitative role of pre-reading activities in setting up the context and activation of the reader's prior knowledge. Along the same lines, Norris and Phillips (1987) emphasize that comprehension occurs only when the reader is able to set in motion his or her background knowledge. They believe that prior knowledge is essential for interpreting an author's message. Cook (1997) refers to schema theory and underlines the necessity of providing students with the background knowledge they need in order to help in solving their comprehension problems.

The facilitative effects of activating readers' prior knowledge in understanding new texts is underscored by many including Langer (1981) and Johnson (1982). According to these researchers, pre-reading activities make the reading task easier in addition to preparing the readers for the upcoming concepts and connecting the new and old ones. The main function of pre-reading activities, therefore, is to activate prior knowledge structures or make them accessible to the reader that lacks them (Yusuf, 2011).

Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2015) researched the effects of vocabulary definitions, text summary and pre-passage questions, as pre-reading activities, on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. They selected 200 subjects, one hundred intermediate and one hundred advanced, based on the results of a placement test. Two intermediate level and two advanced level texts were chosen for reading purposes. The gathered data were analyzed using ANOVA and a follow up Tukey's HSD which showed that the experimental groups had outperformed the control group with text-summary group performing much better than the other three groups.

Even though the majority of studies show a significant positive effect for using pre-reading activities in regard to comprehension, there are studies which have found no significant difference between pre-reading and no pre-reading situations. Jahangard, Moinzadeh and Karimi (2011), for example, studied the effects of grammar and vocabulary pre-teaching, from the stand point of schema theory. The two strategies were used as two types of pre-reading activities, and their effects on EFL learners' reading comprehension were measured. Students in group A received grammar pre-teaching as support for their reading comprehension, whereas students in group B underwent vocabulary pre-teaching. Students in the control group received no particular pre-teaching support. The results of the analysis after the posttest showed no significant difference among the three groups. Strangely enough, the grammar group performed worse than the control group.

3. Method

In the first session, all learners took a proficiency test to choose the elementary level learners only. The elementary level learners were assigned to four groups. The next step was to administer the pretest to determine the existing knowledge of participants before receiving any kind of instruction. The treatment in each group comprised of seven sessions that lasted for 2 months. Each session consisted of three stages, *pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading* activities.

In the movie-watching group (MWG), the movies were selected based on the content and level of language difficulty and presented one in every session. As the students watched the movies, the teacher stopped them occasionally to check for comprehension. After watching each movie, they received the reading passage which was followed by the teacher reading it. In the post reading stage, the students were asked to answer some oral questions, and they were given a simple assignment to do within 2-3 min. Then, each student was asked to explain the movie or reading passage.

In the pre-reading vocabulary group (PVG), some lexical items were singled out and presented by the teacher using their synonyms or paraphrases. The words were selected on the basis of their importance and likelihood that they were unknown to the students. All these lexical items were written on the whiteboard with their definitions or synonyms. The words were defined and explained in context.

In the pre-reading summarization group (PSG), the summary of the related passage was written on the whiteboard before reading the full-length text. This activity took ten minutes like the pre-reading activities in other groups. There was no pre-reading stage in the NTG or no-treatment group. They received a passage and began reading the task immediately.

4. Results

After assigning the students to different groups and administering the pretest, normality of the obtained scores, which is an important assumption of parametric tests, was checked by running 1-Sample K-S tests. Table 1 shows the results of these tests.

Table 1. Normality of Scores' Distributions in Pretest

	Pretest group one	Pretest group two	Pretest group three	Pretest group four
N	19	19	19	19
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.221	.318	.868	.711

a. Test distribution is normal

The larger than .05 values in *Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)* row mean that the assumption of normality had not been violated in any of the distributions of scores.

After making sure that the scores were normally distributed, a One-way ANOVA accompanied by a Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was run to see if the groups were homogeneous and the means of their scores were not substantially different from each other. The results of these tests are given in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2. Test of Equality of Variances

Levene's Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.035	3	72	.117

Table 3. Comparing Scores in Pretest

Squares	Sum of	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	32.145	3	10.715	2.489	.067
Within groups	309.895	72	4.304		
Total	342.039	75			

Based on the *Sig* value displayed in Table 2, it can be concluded that the assumption of homogeneity of variances had not been violated with *P=.117>.05*. Table 3 shows that the *Sig*. value is equal to .067 which is larger than .05. This means that, at the beginning of the study there had not been any significant difference(s) among the groups in terms of their reading comprehension ability.

It was after these preliminary analyses that the actual study began. The treatments were offered to the participants for seven weeks and each group was given a posttest afterwards which was the exact replica of the pretest administered at the beginning of the course. The normality of the scores' distributions, as in the pretest, were checked using 1-sample K-S tests to see if they were appropriate for running Paired-samples T-tests. The distributions of scores proved to be normal at this stage too.

Paired-samples T-tests could show if the participants had made any significant gains from the pretests to the posttests with respect to their reading comprehension ability. The results of these tests are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Paired-samples T-tests Comparing Pretest and Posttest Results

		Paired Differences						
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest control group - Posttest control group	5.5263 7.4211	3.13343 2.61015	-3.16888	-.62059	-3.124	18	.006
Pair 2	Pretest vocabulary group - Posttest vocabulary group	4.6842 11.1579	1.79668 2.65127	-7.59104	-5.35632	-12.172	18	.000
Pair 3	Pretest movie group - Posttest movie group	6.4737 13.4211	1.71167 1.42657	-8.03078	-5.86396	-13.472	18	.000
Pair 4	Pretest summary group - Posttest summary group	5.9474 10.0526	2.24781 2.59216	-5.22869	-2.98184	-7.677	18	.000

The *Sig* value obtained for the control group shows a significant increase in the participants' mean scores from the pretest to the posttest. There had also been statistically significant increases in the participants' mean scores from the

pretests to the posttests in pre-reading vocabulary, movie watching, and summarization groups all with *P* values equal to .000. These findings reject the study's first null hypothesis.

To test the study's second null hypothesis, we needed to compare all of the four groups' results after finishing the course and figuring out if the gains by the groups were significantly different from each other. A One-way ANOVA was run for this purpose along with a homogeneity and a Scheffee post-hoc tests.

The homogeneity test showed that this assumption had not been violated with *P=.116>.05*. The ANOVA test also showed a significant difference among the groups at *P=.000>.05* level at the posttest stage. Tables 5 and 6 shows the results of these tests.

Table 5. Homogeneity of the groups in Posttest

Scores post			
Levene's Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.036	3	72	.116

Table 6. Comparing Group Means at Posttest

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	354.250	3	118.083	20.903	.000
Within Groups	406.737	72	5.649		
Total	760.987	75			

ANOVA, however, is an omnibus test and does not show where the difference(s) lie when we compare groups. To find out about the location of differences a Scheffe post hoc test was utilized the results of which are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Multiple Comparisons of Posttest Results

					95% Confidence Interval	
(I) groups post	(J) groups post	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Posttest movie group	Posttest vocab g	2.26316*	.77113	.042	.0556	4.4707
	Posttest sum g	3.36842*	.77113	.001	1.1609	5.5760
	Posttest con g	6.00000*	.77113	.000	3.7924	8.2076
Posttest vocabulary group	Posttest movie g	-2.26316*	.77113	.042	-4.4707	-.0556
	Posttest sum g	1.10526	.77113	.564	-1.1023	3.3128
	Posttest con g	3.73684*	.77113	.000	1.5293	5.9444
Posttest summary group	Posttest movie g	-3.36842*	.77113	.001	-5.5760	-1.1609
	Posttest vocab g	-1.10526	.77113	.564	-3.3128	1.1023
	Posttest con g	2.63158*	.77113	.012	.4240	4.8391
Posttest control group	Posttest movie g	-6.00000*	.77113	.000	-8.2076	-3.7924
	Posttest vocab g	-3.73684*	.77113	.000	-5.9444	-1.5293
	Posttest sum g	-2.63158*	.77113	.012	-4.8391	-.4240

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The post hoc test revealed that the differences between five comparisons, that is, movie/vocab, movie/summarization, movie/control, vocab/control, and summarization /control had been significant but the difference between pre-reading vocabulary and pre-reading summarization groups had not been significantly different. All these findings compel us to reject our second null hypothesis that had predicted no difference in the effectiveness of the three pre-reading activities at the posttest stage.

There may be situations, however, where researchers want to combine the two approaches in one study, with one independent variable being between-subjects (groups) and the other within subjects (time). This type of hypotheses are tested using Split-plot ANOVA (SPANOVA) alternatively called Mixed between-within subjects ANOVA. Our third hypothesis required such a procedure because we wanted to measure the effect of time on students' gains in different

groups from posttests to delayed posttests. In other words, we wanted to test the significance of the main effects of the independent variables and their interaction.

Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics of the groups in posttest and delayed posttest.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of Posttest and Delayed Posttest Scores

	Class type	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Scores in posttest	Movie	13.4211	1.42657	19
	Vocab	11.1579	2.65127	19
	Summarization	10.0526	2.59216	19
	Total	11.5439	2.65969	57
Scores in delayed posttest	Movie	13.1579	1.53707	19
	Vocab	11.4737	2.71556	19
	Summarization	9.1579	2.52241	19
	Total	11.2632	2.81277	57

Apparently, mean differences between the posttest and delayed posttest scores had been very small. However, whether these differences reached the significance level or not was the point that Multivariate Test table, produced as part of SPANOVA output, could tell us.

Like many of parametric tests, SPANOVA has assumptions that should be met before running the test. One of these assumptions is the equality of the covariance matrices which in SPSS output is presented in the Box's table. The *P*-value for this statistic should exceed .001 for us not to violate this assumption. As can be seen in Table 9, the *P*-value for this statistic is slightly larger than the borderline value, meaning that the assumption had not been violated.

Table 9. Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices

Box's M	23.188
f	3.658
Df	16
Df	272675.692
Sig.	.002

Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matricesa

Another assumption of SPANOVA is the equality of error variances or homogeneity of the groups. This assumption as usual is checked by the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances. For this statistic we needed non-significant values for both of the posttest and delayed posttest scores. Table 10 shows that the *Sig* values for the posttest and delayed posttest scores are .072 and.106 respectively, both non-significant.

Table 10. Test of Equality of Variances

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Scores in posttest	2.767	2	54	.072
Scores in delayed posttest	2.340	2	54	.106

Multivariate tests show whether the effect of interaction had been significant or not. It should be noted, however, that all these tests do the same thing, so we should look only at one of them, preferably Pillai's Trace or Wilks' Lambda, because these two tests are more powerful than the others in disclosing interactions. Table 11 shows the results of these tests.

Table 11. Tests of Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Time	Pillai's Trace	.053	3.048[b]	1.000	54.000	.087	.053
	Wilks' Lambda	.947	3.048[b]	1.000	54.000	.087	.053
	Hotelling's Trace	.056	3.048[b]	1.000	54.000	.087	.053
	Roy's Largest Root	.056	3.048[b]	1.000	54.000	.087	.053
Time * Class type	Pillai's Trace	.149	4.726[b]	2.000	54.000	.013	.149
	Wilks' Lambda	.851	4.726[b]	2.000	54.000	.013	.149
	Hotelling's Trace	.175	4.726[b]	2.000	54.000	.013	.149
	Roy's Largest Root	.175	4.726[b]	2.000	54.000	.013	.149

As can be seen in Table 11, all multivariate test results are significant for interaction between time and class type in our data, meaning that there had been an effect for interaction.

Looking at the tests of within-subjects contrasts and tests of between-subjects effects tells us about the main effects of our independent variables, namely, time and class type. As indicated in Table 12, the main effect of time had been non-significant. However, the main effect of class type, as presented in Table 13, had been significant at P=.000<.05 level. We should also remember that the interaction between time and class type had also been significant, as we learned from our multivariate tests table. These three pieces of information could help us in rejecting or accepting our third null hypothesis which was directed at investigating the effect of passage of time on the participants' gains. Tables 12 and 13 are given below with the non-significant effect for time alone but significant effects for time and class type interaction plus class type.

Table 12. Main Effect of Time

Source	times	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Time	Linear	2.246	1	2.246	3.048	.087	.053
Time * class type	Linear	6.965	2	3.482	4.726	.013	.149
Error(times)	Linear	39.789	54	.737			

Table 13. Main Effect of Class Type

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts

Measure: MEASURE_1

Transformed Variable: Average

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	14824.561	1	14824.561	1498.818	.000	.965
Class type	258.333	2	129.167	13.059	.000	.326
Error	534.105	54	9.891			

These results reject our third null hypothesis by suggesting a change over time which had been the result of both instruction type and its interaction with time but not time alone.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The first research question was "Do pre-reading activities affect students' reading comprehension from pretests to posttests?" The analysis of data revealed that pre-reading activities, in general, improved students' comprehension of texts because pre-reading strategies activate students' prior knowledge. Therefore, the findings advocated the use of pre-reading activities which is in line with the findings of other research (Chang, 1990; Maghsoudi, 2012; Mihara, 2011; Zhaohua, 2004). In addition, the study findings implied the employment of pre-reading activities in reading classes as a motivational factor. Motivation, according to Ur (2007) plays an important role in foreign language learning.

The second research question was "Is there any difference in the effectiveness of the three pre-reading activities of watching movies, vocabulary presentation, and pre-reading summarization?". Analysis of the results provided evidence that there were significant differences among the groups experiencing different pre-reading activities. The movie-watching group outperformed the other two groups. This finding is consistent with the results of Gebhard (1987) whose study showed that by providing background knowledge on a reading through exposing students to short movies, teachers can facilitate successful reading comprehension. This finding also seemed to be in line with the results of studies which showed that watching movies has stronger effect on L2 reading comprehension (e.g., Gambrell & Jawits, 1993; Ismaili, 2013). Movies are possibly more entertaining and engaging to students. According to Gambrell and Jawits (1993), movies provide delightful occasions for students to develop background knowledge and to combine it with their own understanding of a story or concept. The four-skill activities in the classroom are furthermore activated by background knowledge that is provided by movies in EFL classrooms, as Herron and Hanley (1992) put it, which is necessary for stimulating students.

Results also revealed that the vocabulary group's performance in the posttest had been better than the summarization group's performance. Unlike the findings of this study, Carrell (1984) believes that teaching new vocabulary is only effective if it is "integrated with both the student's preexisting knowledge and other pre-reading activities designed to build background knowledge" (p. 337). In addition to this, Carrell (1984) believes that vocabulary and schemata should be developed by "pre-teaching vocabulary and background knowledge concurrently" (p. 340). It is possible that if one group had received vocabulary presentation and pre-reading summarization simultaneously, more significant results might have emerged.

Regarding the third research question, which aimed at investigating the effect of time, the results rejected the null hypothesis, that is, decrease in the students' scores in the delayed posttest is the result of the passage of time only. Contrary to this, this study produced evidence in favor of the impact of time and class type jointly on the reading comprehension of the EFL learners. That is, time and the kind of pre-reading activity together affected the learners' reading comprehension and decrease in students' scores was not solely the result of time passage. This is in line with Day's (1982) claim that students' curiosity can be stimulated by visuals as they attempt to analyze the associated concepts with pictures. This stimulation of curiosity might then more effectively focus learners' attention on the subject matter being introduced, which in the long run might lead to an even more effective acquisition of information. When applied to reading comprehension the findings of the present study demonstrate that increased levels of attention on key words and main concepts before reading the passage can persist in learners' working memory, hence making the associated meanings more memorable.

From the discussion of findings, one can conclude that pre-reading activities have positive effects on students' performance in reading comprehension. The present study agrees with Langer (1981) and provides more empirical support to the fact that pre-reading activities boost students' interest and help them construct mental models for the in-coming text. Taken all points together, the results reveal that there might be differences between students' performance in reading comprehension with regard to the type of pre-reading activity they are exposed to. The findings also show that the most effective pre-reading activity is movie-watching. These results are in agreement with those of Mcnamara et. al., 2011. Using pre-reading strategies that activate students' prior knowledge, for instance movie watching, will enable students to connect to the content and comprehend the material.

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